

Sermon

Again and Again, The Sun will Rise

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

Easter Sunday – April 4, 2021

Happy Easter my friends! Our Lord is risen, hallelujah! Today we celebrate this joyous message with new energy and vigor. Our scriptures today from Acts and John's gospel take us on a familiar journey but one that we see with new eyes today because while our scriptures are the same we are oh so different then we were just one year ago.

When someone dies, it is so difficult to manage that grief but immediately there are things that have to be done. I recall when my dad passed away around midnight, I had to go to the nursing home in the middle of the night, gather his belongings from his room, and say my final goodbye...immediately upon rising the next day, I had to contact a funeral home and many tasks followed thereafter. These are just things that you have to do when someone dies..there is almost no time to grieve in those first few days. In our Gospel, Mary Magdalene is preparing to go about the business of death for Jesus. She was with him until he died, and then helped dress the body and was returning to place spices in the tomb and do the things that you do when someone dies, at that time. So she gets to the tomb, and things immediately are not as she expects them to be...the stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty. What she came to do, she cannot do. You can sense how confused she was and turns to go back immediately, running, to tell the disciples what she found. And when she finds Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, they run too – dropping whatever they were going to do and they

confirm what Mary had told them...and they, Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple then return to their homes.

But Mary stayed at the tomb...weeping. She's the only one who stayed with Jesus through his death and mourned at this gravesite...and then she sees the angels and she turns and sees Jesus.

This past year as we were going about our lives doing things as we had always been taught – going to work, keeping our appointments, taking kids to school, activities, vacations – full calendars and keeping up with our busy lifestyles – and then bam...we went to the tomb, and it was empty. Do remember that moment? When you were told to stay home from work – to stay home from church, cancel doctor appointments and school and vacations- did you look down at your calendar and think, what do I do now? How do I do it? Everything we understood about living day to day in those moments, and for all the moments before, changed. We had to learn to navigate in an entirely new way. Without the routines we were used to. Mary went to the tomb that day with love and grief in her heart, but unlike the other disciples, she didn't run away, did she...she couldn't do the tasks but she still allowed herself to feel the feelings go through the emotions. Even the anxiety and confusion. And when the other disciples left her alone to deal with this, Jesus didn't. There were angels who gently gave Mary comfort so that she could indeed see our risen Lord and most importantly, hear Him call her name. When she didn't recognize him through her confusion...He simply said...Mary. Have you ever had someone use your name in a situation and just love the way that it sounds – it's very personal, isn't it Vicki? When you hear someone use your name, right Bill? For example, Jeff, when someone says your

name they draw you into the conversation don't they Graham? The Easter Community is a community whose members have heard the Good Shepherd calling their names. They also become a community of those who know the importance of knowing and calling the names of those whom they encounter. I have seen frequently at the end of several newscasts names and pictures of those who have died from the Coronavirus or those who have died on one of the recent shootings. I always pause and watch those – so important to recognize those from our community who have perished to honor them.

The story in Acts is such an important one- the act of witnessing. What Peter discovers is that witnesses are called to share the gospel account with others, to testify to the good news of Jesus Christ, but they are not called to be the community of faith. This new community is to be whatever God calls it to be and to include whoever God chooses for it to include. Do you understand this? Not just us...Bacon Memorial...or not just Presbyterians as named or Christians...God selects his witnesses.

The story begins where we learn about Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who lived at Caesarea and was a God-fearer, particularly known for his generosity to the poor. He has a dream that tells him to find Peter to share his witness. Meanwhile, Peter also has a dream regarding clean and unclean animals – telling him God decides what is clean and unclean. This is a story of equality – God's equality and reconciliation. The way God brings these two men– Jew and Gentile, together to share the message of love, justice and reconciliation – still resonates today. Today more than ever before perhaps.

This past year brought us much pain, grief, fear but we stand here at the beginning of the end of this tough 14 months – at the beginning of our Eastertide, with this day to celebrate. The Easter image we receive in this story reminds the church that it is the beloved community that can be quick to look for the work of divine love amid the tragedies of personal existence and the injustices of social experience, even when most of the world believes that dream has long since ended. It is an image that reminds the beloved community of the church that it can be bold to believe the signs it hears in its Scriptures, receives in its history, celebrates in its liturgy and embody its acts of love toward the world.

We are at a crossroads, you and me and this world of ours. We are on the brink of change and this isn't little change, this is big change. With the George Floyd trial and things beginning to return to a more familiar pace, like Mary was looking for when she came to the tomb, but like Mary, she nor we can ever go back to the way things were – nor should we wish to. This is an opportunity for us as witnesses to the resurrection. In a day when we are confronted with various causes of divisions – ethnic splits, abortion, gender questions, gun control laws, immigration, and race – to name only a few- it is essential to hear on Easter that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is not only the guarantee of a future life, but the declaration of the end of end of ancient divisions and the hope of a new day.

We turn this corner together, still not sure what we will find when we arrive at the future, but like Mary we shall keep our focus on our love of Christ with the belief that He will indeed create a new tomorrow for us and the world – one that is worth looking forward to....again and again, the sun will rise on a new day and God will indeed turn this world around. Amen